

A READING ON SLAVERY,

FROM THE

EARLY PRESIDENTS.

**Prepared for the Celebration of Washington's Birthday
at Lyceum Hall, Salem, February 22, 1863.**

GEORGE WASHINGTON.—*1st President.*

April 12, 1786, to Robert Morris :

“ I hope it will not be conceived, from these observations, that it is my wish to hold the unhappy people who are the subject of this letter in slavery. I can only say, that there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it.”

Sep. 9, 1786, to John F. Mercer.

“ I never mean, unless some particular circumstance should compel me to it, to possess another slave by purchase, it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this country may be abolished by law.”

To Sir John Sinclair, 11th December, 1796 :

“ The present prices of lands in Pennsylvania are higher than they are in Maryland and Virginia, although they are not of superior quality ; (among other reasons) because there are laws here for the gradual abolition of slavery, which neither of the two States above mentioned have at present, but which nothing is more certain than they must have, and at a period not remote.”

The 5th of February, 1783, Lafayette writes :

“ Now, my dear General, that you are going to enjoy some ease and quiet, permit me to propose a plan to you, which might become greatly beneficial to the black part of mankind. Let us unite in purchasing a small estate, where we may try the experiment to free the negroes, and use them only as ten

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ants. Such an example as yours might render it a general practice; and, if we succeed in America, I will cheerfully devote a part of my time to render the method fashionable in the West Indies. If it be a wild scheme, I had rather be mad in this way, than to be thought wise in the other task."—*Correspondence of the American Revolution*, vol. iii., p. 547.

To this letter Washington replies, April 5th, 1783:

"The scheme, my dear Marquis, which you propose as a precedent to encourage the emancipation of the black people in this country from that state of bondage in which they are held, is a striking evidence of the benevolence of your heart. I shall be happy to join you in so laudable a work, but will defer going into a detail of the business till I have the pleasure of seeing you."—*Sparks' Washington*, vol. viii., pp. 414, 415.

"MOUNT VERNON, 10th May, 1786.

"The benevolence of your heart, my dear Marquis, is so conspicuous upon all occasions, that I never wonder at any fresh proofs of it; but your late purchase of an estate in the colony of Cayenne, with a view of emancipating the slaves on it, is a generous and noble proof of your humanity. Would to God a like spirit might diffuse itself generally into the minds of the people of this country! But I despair of seeing it. Some petitions were presented to the Assembly, at its last session, for the abolition of slavery; but they could scarcely obtain a reading. To set the slaves afloat at once would, I really believe, be productive of much inconvenience and mischief, but by degrees it certainly might, and assuredly ought to be effected, and that, too, by legislative authority."

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JOHN ADAMS.—2d President

His sentiments on the subject of slavery are well known. They are well summed up in the language of a letter to Robert L. Evans, June, 1819:

"Every measure of prudence, therefore, ought to be assumed for the eventual total extirpation of slavery from the United States.

"I have, through my whole life, held the practice of slavery in such abhorrence, that I have never owned a negro or any other slave; though I have lived for many years in times when the practice was not disgraceful; when the best men in my vicinity thought it not inconsistent with their character; and when it has cost me thousands of dollars for the labor and sub-

sistence of free men, which I might have saved by the purchase of negroes at times when they were very cheap."—*Works of John Adams*, vol. x., p. 380.

THOMAS JEFFERSON.—3d President.

From Mr. Jefferson's Original Draft of the Declaration of Independence.

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him; captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of Infidel Powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce.

From Mr. Jefferson's Minutes of Debates in 1776, on the Declaration of Independence, published with the Madison Papers.

The clause, too, reprobating the enslaving of the inhabitants of Africa was struck out, in compliance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who, on the contrary, still wished to continue it. Our northern brethren, also, I believe, felt a little tender under those censures; for, though their people have very few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others.

1781. *From Notes on Virginia.*

There must, doubtless, be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people, produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions—the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave, he is learning to do what he sees others do. If a parent could find no motive, either in his philanthropy or his self-love, for restraining the intemperance of passion towards his slave, it should

always be a sufficient one that his child is present. But generally it is not sufficient. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of similar slaves, gives a loose rein to the worst of passions; and, thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can restrain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who, permitting one-half the citizens thns to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies; destroys the morals of the one part, and the *amor patriæ* of the other; for if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labor for another; in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature; contribute, as far as depends on his individual endeavors, to the evanishment of the human race; or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations proceeding from him. With the morals of the people, their industry also is destroyed; for, in a warm climate, no man will labor for himself who can make another labor for him. This is so trne, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion, indeed, are even seen to labor. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secur, when we have removed their only firm basis—a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? that they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever; that, considering numbers, nature, and natural means, only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest. But it is impossible to be temperate and to pursue this subjet through the various considerations of policy, of morals, of history, natural and civil. We must be contented to hope they will force their way into every one's mind. I think a change already perceptible, since the origin of the present Revolution. The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing, under the auspices of Heaven, for a total emancipation; and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.

And again, speaking of the negro :

Whether further observation will or will not verify the con-

jecture, that nature has been less bountiful to them in the endowments of the head, I believe that in those of the heart she will be found to have done them justice. That disposition to theft with which they have been branded, must be ascribed to their situation, and not to any depravity of the moral sense. The man in whose favor no laws of property existed, probably feels himself less bound to respect those made in favor of others. When arguing for ourselves, we lay it down as a fundamental, that laws, to be just, must give a reciprocation of right; that without this, they are mere arbitrary rules of conduct, founded in force, and not in conscience; and it is a problem which I give the master to solve, whether the religious precepts against the violation of property were not framed for him as well as his slave? And whether the slave may not as justifiably take a little from one who has taken all from him, as he may slay one who would slay him? That a change in the relations in which a man is placed should change his ideas of moral right or wrong, is neither new nor peculiar to the color of the blacks. Homer tells us it was so 2,600 years ago.

Jove fix'd it certain, that whatever day
Makes man a slave, takes half his worth away.

But the slaves of which Homer speaks were whites. Notwithstanding these considerations, which must weaken their respect for the laws of property, we find among them numerous instances of the most rigid integrity, and as many as among their better instructed masters, of benevolence, gratitude, and unshaken fidelity. The opinion that they are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination, must be hazarded with great diffidence.

1786. *To a Friend in France.*

What a stupendous, what an incomprehensible machine is man! who can endure toil, famine, stripes, imprisonment, and death itself, in vindication of his own liberty, and the next moment be deaf to all those motives whose power supported him through his trial, and inflict on his fellow-men a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose. But we must await, with patience, the workings of an overruling Providence, and hope that that is preparing the deliverance of those our suffering brethren. When the measure of their tears shall be full, when their groans shall have involved heaven itself in darkness, doubtless a God of Justice will awaken to their distress, and, by diffusing light and liberality among their oppressors, or at length by his exterminating thunder, manifest his attention to the things of this world, and that they are not left to the guidance of a blind fatality.

JAMES MADISON.—4th President.

From Mr. Madison's Report of Debates in the Federal Convention.

Mr. Madison: We have seen the mere distinction of color made, in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man.

Mr. Madison: And, in the third place, where slavery exists, the republican theory becomes still more fallacious.

MR. MADISON THOUGHT IT WRONG TO ADMIT, IN THE CONSTITUTION, THE IDEA THAT THERE COULD BE PROPERTY IN MEN.

Mr. Madison to Joseph Jones.—[Extract.]

PHILADELPHIA, Nov. 28, 1780.

Yours of the 18th came yesterday. I am glad to find the Legislature persist in their resolution to recruit their line of the army for the war; though without deciding on the expediency of the mode under their consideration, would it not be as well to liberate and make soldiers at once of the blacks themselves, as to make them instruments for enlisting white soldiers? It would certainly be more consonant with the principles of liberty, which ought never to be lost sight of in a contest for liberty.

JAMES MONROE.—5th President.

Extract of a speech from Ex-President Monroe, delivered in the Virginia State Convention for altering the Constitution, Nov. 2d, 1829.

“ What has been the leading spirit of this State, ever since our independence was obtained? She has always declared herself in favor of the equal rights of man. The revolution was conducted on that principle. Yet there was at that time a slavish population in Virginia. We hold it in the condition in which the revolution found it, and what can be done with this population?

“ Sir, what brought us together in the revolutionary war? It was the doctrine of equal rights. Each part of the country encouraged and supported every other part of it. None took

advantage of the others' distresses. And if we find that this evil has preyed upon the vitals of the Union, and has been prejudicial to all the States where it has existed, *and is likewise repugnant to their several State Constitutions and Bills of Rights*, why may we not expect that they will unite with us in accomplishing its removal? If we make the attempt, and cannot accomplish it, the effect will at least be to abate the great number of petitions and memorials which are continually pouring in upon the Government. This matter is before the nation, and the principles and consequences involved in it are of the highest importance. But, in the meanwhile, self-preservation demands of us union in our councils.

“What was the origin of our slave population? The evil commenced when we were in our colonial state, but acts were passed by our colonial Legislature, prohibiting the importation of more slaves into the colony. These were rejected by the Crown. We declared our independence, and the prohibition of a further importation was among the first acts of State sovereignty. Virginia was the first State which instructed her delegates to declare the Colonies independent. She braved all dangers. From Quebec to Boston, and from Boston to Savannah, Virginia shed the blood of her sons. No imputation, then, can be cast upon her in this matter. *She did all that was in her power to do, to prevent the extension of slavery, and to mitigate its evils.*”

The views of slavery entertained by JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, *6th President of the United States*, are too familiar to be quoted.

This Reading from the Presidents closes with the Proclamations of Gen. JACKSON, *7th President*, inviting the negroes of Louisiana to arms in 1814.

HEADQUARTERS, 7TH MILITARY DISTRICT, }
MOBILE, Sept. 21, 1814. }

To the Free Colored Inhabitants of Louisiana.

Through a mistaken policy, you have heretofore been deprived of a participation in the glorious struggle for national rights in which our country is engaged. This no longer shall exist.

As sons of freedom, you are now called upon to defend our most inestimable blessing. As Americans, your country looks with confidence to her adopted children for a valorous support, as a faithful return for the advantages enjoyed under her mild and equitable government. As fathers, husbands, and brothers, you are summoned to rally around the standard of the Eagle, to defend all which is dear in existence.

Your country, although calling for your exertions, does not wish you to engage in her cause without amply remunerating you for the services rendered. Your intelligent minds are not to be led away by false representations. Your love of honor would cause you to despise the man who should attempt to deceive you. In the sincerity of a soldier and the language of truth I address you.

To every noble-hearted, generous freeman of color, volunteering to serve during the present contest with Great Britain, and no longer, there will be paid the same bounty, in money and lands, now received by the white soldiers of the United States, viz., one hundred and twenty-four dollars in money, and one hundred and sixty acres of land. The non-commissioned officers and privates will also be entitled to the same monthly pay and daily rations, and clothes, furnished to any American soldier.

On enrolling yourselves in companies, the Major-General commanding will select officers for your government from your white fellow-citizens. Your non-commissioned officers will be appointed from among yourselves.

Due regard will be paid to the feelings of freemen and soldiers. You will not, by being associated with white men in the same corps, be exposed to improper comparisons or unjust sarcasm. As a distinct, independent battalion or regiment, pursuing the path of glory, you will, undivided, receive the applause and gratitude of your countrymen.

To assure you of the sincerity of my intentions, and my anxiety to engage your invaluable services to our country, I have communicated my wishes to the governor of Louisiana, who is fully informed as to the manner of enrolment, and will give you every necessary information on the subject of this address.

ANDREW JACKSON,
Major-General Commanding.

GENERAL JACKSON'S ADDRESS TO THE "MEN OF COLOR," ON THE
18TH OF DECEMBER, 1814, AT NEW ORLEANS.

Soldiers: From the shores of Mobile I collected you to arms. I invited you to share the perils and to divide the glory of your white countrymen. I expected much from you, for I was not uninformed of those qualities which must render you so formidable to an invading foe. I knew that you could endure hunger and thirst, and all the hardships of war. I knew that you loved the land of your nativity, and that, like ourselves, you had to defend all that is most dear to man. *But you surpass my hopes. I have found in you, united to these qualities, that noble enthusiasm which impels to great deeds.*

Soldiers: The President of the United States shall be informed of your conduct on the present occasion, and the voice of the representatives of the American nation shall applaud your valor, as your general now praises your ardor. The enemy is near: his "sails cover the lakes;" but the brave are united, and if he finds us contending among ourselves, it will be for the prize of valor and fame, its noblest reward.

By command,

THOS. L. BUTLER,
Aid de Camp.

(See Niles' Register, Vol. VII., p. 346.)

A Private Letter Written by GENERAL JACKSON, on the 1st of May, 1833, to Rev. A. J. CRAWFORD.

"I have had a laborious task here; but nullification is dead, and its actors and courtiers will only be remembered by the people to be execrated for their wicked designs to sever and destroy the only good government on the globe, and that prosperity and happiness we enjoy over every other portion of the world. Haman's gallows ought to be the fate of all such ambitious men, who would involve the country in civil war, and all the evils in its train, that they might reign and ride on its whirlwinds, and direct the storm. The free people of these United States have spoken, and consigned these demagogues to their proper doom. Take care of your nullifiers you have amongst you. Let them meet the indignant frowns of every man who loves his country. The tariff, it is now known, was a mere pretext, and disunion and a Southern Confederacy the real object. The next pretext will be the negro, or the slavery question."

WHAT THE FATHERS THOUGHT OF THE
BLACKS AS SLAVES, AS SOLDIERS,
AND AS MEN.

A reading prepared for the celebration of Washington's birth-day at Lyceum Hall, Salem, Massachusetts, A. D. 1863.

An address to the Public, from the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, and the relief of free negroes unlawfully held in bondage.

It is with peculiar satisfaction we assure the friends of humanity, that in prosecuting the design of our association, our endeavors have proved successful, far beyond the most sanguine expectations.

Encouraged by this success, and by the daily progress of that luminous and benign spirit of liberty which is diffusing itself throughout the world, and humbly hoping for the continuance of the divine blessing on our labors, we have ventured to make an important addition to our original plan, and do therefore earnestly solicit the support and assistance of all who can feel the tender emotions of sympathy and compassion, or relish the exalted pleasure of benevolence.

Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with solicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evil.

The unhappy man, who has long been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart. Accustomed to move like a mere machine, by the will of a master, reflection is suspended; he has not the power of choice, and reason and conscience have but little influence over his conduct, because he is chiefly governed by the passion of fear. He is poor and friendless, perhaps worn out by extreme labor, age, and disease.

Under such circumstances, freedom may often prove a misfortune to himself, and prejudicial to society.

Attention to emancipated black people, it is therefore to be hoped, will become a branch of our national police; but so far as we contribute to promote this emancipation, so far that attention is evidently a serious duty incumbent on us, and which we mean to discharge to the best of our judgment and abilities.

To instruct, to advise, to qualify those who have been restored to freedom, for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty, to

promote in them habits of industry, to furnish them with em-
ployments suited to their age, sex, talents, and other circum-
stances, and to procure their children an education calculated
for their future situation in life—these are the great outlines of
the annexed plan, which we have adopted, and which we con-
ceive will essentially promote the public good, and the happiness
of these our hitherto too much neglected fellow-creatures.

Signed, by order of the Society,

B. FRANKLIN,
President.

Philadelphia, November 9, 1789.

The last public act of Franklin's life was the signing, as President of the same society, of the following memorial to Congress. The society was as old as 1774—the first of the kind in the country.

“The memorial respectfully showeth,—

“That, from a regard for the happiness of mankind, an association was formed several years since in this State, by a number of her citizens, of various religious denominations, for promoting the abolition of slavery, and for the relief of those unlawfully held in bondage. A just and acute conception of the true principles of liberty, as it spread through the land, produced accessions to their numbers, many friends to their cause and a legislative co-operation with their views, which, by the blessing of Divine Providence, have been successfully directed to the relieving from bondage a large number of their fellow creatures of the African race. They have also the satisfaction to observe that, in consequence of that spirit of philanthropy and genuine liberty which is generally diffusing its beneficial influence, similar institutions are forming at home and abroad.

“That mankind are all formed by the same Almighty Being, alike objects of his care, and equally designed for the enjoyment of happiness, the Christian religion teaches us to believe, and the political creed of Americans fully coincides with the position. Your memorialists, particularly engaged in attending to the distresses arising from slavery, believe it their indispensable duty to present this subject to your notice. They have observed, with real satisfaction, that many important and salutary powers are vested in you for ‘promoting the welfare and securing the blessings of liberty to the people of the United States;’ and as they conceive that these blessings ought rightfully to be administered, without distinction of color, to all descriptions of people, so they indulge themselves in the pleasing expectation, that nothing which can be done for the relief of the unhappy objects of their care, will be either omitted or delayed.

of slavery for a time. It was imposed upon us by another nation, while we were yet in a state of colonial vassalage. It cannot be easily or suddenly removed. Yet while it continues, *it is a blot on our national character*, and every real lover of freedom confidently hopes that it will be effectually, though it will be gradually, wiped away; and earnestly looks for the means by which this necessary object may be best attained. And until it shall be accomplished, until the time shall come when we can point, without a blush, to the language held in the Declaration of Independence, every friend of humanity will seek to lighten the galling chain of slavery, and better, to the utmost of his power, the wretched condition of the slave. Such was Mr. Gruber's object in that part of his sermon of which I am now speaking. Those who have complained of him, and reproached him, will not find it easy to answer him; unless complaints, reproaches, and persecution shall be considered an answer."

Alexander Hamilton wrote to an American Tory, in 1774:

" The fundamental source of all your errors, sophisms, and false reasonings, is a total ignorance of the natural rights of mankind—were you once to become acquainted with these, you could never entertain a thought that all men are not by nature entitled to equal privileges. You would be convinced that natural liberty is a gift of a beneficent Creator to the whole human race; and that civil liberty is founded on that."

And to John Jay:

" HEADQUARTERS, March 14, 1779.

" To JOHN JAY:

" Dear Sir,—Col. Laurens, who will have the honor of delivering you this letter, is on his way to South Carolina, on a project which I think, from the present state of affairs there, is a very good one, and deserves every kind of support and encouragement. This is, to raise two, three, or four battalions of negroes, with the assistance of the Government of that State, by contributions from the owners, in proportion to the number they possess. If you should think proper to enter into the subject with him, he will give you a detail of his plan. He wishes to have it recommended by Congress to the State; and, as an inducement, that they should engage to take these battalions into Continental pay.

" It appears to me, that an expedient of this kind in the present state of Southern affairs, is the most rational that can be adopted, and promises very important advantages. Indeed, I hardly see how a sufficient force can be collected in that quarter without it; and the enemy's operations there are growing

infinitely more serious and formidable. I have not the least doubt that the negroes will make very excellent soldiers with proper management; and I will venture to pronounce, that they cannot be put into better hands than those of Mr. Laurens. He has all the zeal, intelligence, enterprise, and every other qualification necessary to succeed in such an undertaking. It is a maxim with some great military judges, that, with sensible officers, soldiers can hardly be too stupid; and, on this principle, it is thought that the Russians would make the best troops in the world, if they were under other officers than their own. The King of Prussia is among the number who maintain this doctrine, and has a very emphatic saying on the occasion, which I do not exactly recollect. I mention this, because I hear it frequently objected to the scheme of embodying negroes, that they are too stupid to make soldiers. This is so far from appearing to me a valid objection, that I think their want of cultivation (for their natural faculties are probably as good as ours), joined to that habit of subordination which they acquire from a life of servitude, will make them sooner become soldiers than our white inhabitants. Let officers be men of sense and sentiment; and the nearer the soldiers approach to machines, perhaps the better.

" I foresee that this project will have to combat much opposition from prejudice and self-interest. The contempt we have been taught to entertain for the blacks makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor experience; and an unwillingness to part with property of so valuable a kind will furnish a thousand arguments to show the impracticability or pernicious tendency of a scheme which requires such a sacrifice. But it should be considered, that, if we do not make use of them in this way, the enemy probably will; and that the best way to counteract the temptations they will hold out will be to offer them ourselves. An essential part of the plan is to give them their freedom with their muskets. This will secure their fidelity, animate their courage, and, I believe, will have a good effect upon those who remain, by opening a door to their emancipation. This circumstance, I confess, has no small weight in inducing me to wish the success of the project; for the dictates of humanity, and true policy, equally interest me in favor of this unfortunate class of men.

" With the truest respect and esteem,

" I am, sir, your most obed't serv't,

" ALEX. HAMILTON."

A single passage from Mr. Bancroft's History, will give a succinct and clear account of the condition of the army, in re-

spect to colored soldiers, at the time of the battle of Bunker Hill:

“ Nor should history forget to record, that as in the army at Cambridge, so also in this gallant band, the free negroes of the Colony had their representatives. For the right of free negroes to bear arms in the public defence was, at that day, as little disputed in New England as their other rights. They took their place, not in a separate corps, but in the ranks with the white man; and their names may be read on the pension rolls of the country, side by side with those of other soldiers of the Revolution.”

Mr. Everett has described Peter Salem, a black man, and once a slave, as having been among the most prominent and meritorious characters at the battle of Bunker’s Hill. Indeed, the historical painting of that scene, by Col. Trumbull, an eye-witness, done in 1785, gives Peter Salem, with other black patriots, a conspicuous place. One of the latter is thus commemorated :

“ *To the Honorable General Court of the Massachusetts Bay:*

“ The subscribers beg leave to report to your Honorable House (which we do in justice to the character of so brave a man), that, under our own observation, we declare that a negro man, called Salem Poor, of Col. Frye’s regiment, Capt. Ames’ company, in the late battle at Charlestown, behaved like an experienced officer, as well as an excellent soldier. To set forth particulars of his conduct would be tedious. We would beg leave to say, in the person of this said negro, centres a brave and gallant soldier. The reward due to so great and distinguished a character, we submit to the Congress.

“ JONA. BREWER, Col.

THOMAS NIXON, Lt. Col.

WM. PRESCOTT, Col.

EPHM. COREY, Lieut.

JOSEPH BAKER, Lieut.

JONAS RICHARDSON, Capt.

ELIPHALET BODWELL, Segt.

JOSIAH FOSTER, Lieut.

EBENR. VARNUM, 2d Lieut.

WM. HUDSON BALLARD, Capt.

WILLIAM SMITH, Capt.

JOHN MORTON, Sergt. [?]

Lieut. RICHARD WELSH.

“ CAMBRIDGE, Dec. 5, 1755.

"In Council, Dec. 21, 1775.—Read, and sent down.

" PEREZ MORTON,

" Dep'y Sec'y."

Patrick Henry was the leading opponent, in America, of the adoption of our present Constitution. In a debate on the question of ratifying or rejecting it in the Virginia State Convention, he used, in opposing it, these strangely prophetic words—with which the reading from the Fathers closes:

" Among ten thousand implied powers which they may assume, they may, if we be engaged in war, liberate every one of your slaves, if they please. And this must and will be done by men, a majority of whom have not a common interest with you. They will, therefore, have no feeling for your interest. It has been repeatedly said here, that the great object of a National Government was national defence. If you give power to the General Government to provide for the general defence, the means must be commensurate to the end. All the means in the possession of the people must be given to the Government which is intrusted with the public defence. In this State there are 236,000 blacks, and there are many in several other States; but there are few or none in the Northern States. May Congress not say *that every black man must fight?* Did we not see a little of this last war? We were not so hard pushed as to make emancipation general: but acts of Assembly passed, that every slave who would go the Army should be free. Another thing will contribute to bring this event about: slavery is detested—we feel its fatal effects—we deplore it with all the pity of humanity. Let all these considerations, at some future period, press with full force on the minds of Congress. Let that humanity which I trust will distinguish America, and the necessity of national defence—let all these things operate on their minds; they will search that paper, and see if they have power of manumission. And have they not, sir? Have they not power to provide for the general defence and welfare? May they not think that these call for the abolition of slavery? May not they pronounce all slaves free, and will they not be warranted by that power? There is no ambiguous implication or logical deduction. The paper speaks to the point. They have the power, in clear, unequivocal terms, and will clearly and certainly exercise it."

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